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ABSTRACT

The location of tension in the text of "A Streetcar Named Desire" is accomplished by close readings of traditional sources, particularly notes on Kazan's "Production"; Williams' thoughts on his script and Kazan's "Production"; and Williams' personal relationships. By logical twists the analysis supports, in this case, the opposite of tradition. The "Streetcar" "text," which includes all "things" almost non-existently connected with it, produces traces which are re-written into spaces located by the disruptive play of difference. (Sixteen endnotes are included.) (RAE)

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Je lis, tu lis, il, elle lit a Preface to A Streetcar Named Desire: Beyond the Preservation Principal

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Je lis, tu lis, il, elle lit a Preface to A Streetcar Named Desire: Beyond the Preservation Principle

> when someone talks just for the sake of talking he is saying the most original and truthful thing he can say.[1]
>
> Never mind.

As we are driven to find the text as "Thing-in-itself," we constantly trace new openings and Write ourselves "new" texts that are "in-themselves" different from themselves;

> The death of interpretation is to believe that there are signs, signs that exist primally, originally, really, as coherent, pertinent, and systematic marks...The life of interpretation, on the contrary, is to believe that there are only interpretations.[2]

The following analysis simply depicts the location of tension in the text of A Streetcar Named Desire and by logical twists supports, in this case, the opposite of tradition. This reversal is accomplished by close readings of traditional sources, particularly notes on Kazan's "PRODUCTION;" Williams' thoughts on his script and Kazan's PRODUCTION, and; Williams' personal relationships. The Streetcar "Text," which includes all "things" almost non-existently connected with it, produces traces which are re-written into spaces located by the disruptive play

of differance.

On Tennessee Williams' pancarte, as he couriers through our retro loveletters of his work, it is written, "Art is made out of symbols the way your body is made out of vital tissue."[3] What is he advertising? Art is made out of what symbols for what? More symbols? Is everything everything? Is my body made out of vital tissue, or is it someone else's, or is it all of ours?

Vital. Is Williams still made out of vital tissue, or is his Geist the vital tissue, in which case it is Williams referring to himself?

Williams' Geist "comes back" to his texts, to himself, because we scream for silence; we become childish in the dark and rush to turn on the lights to hug the vital tissue. Williams' Geist. We are afraid we might "make" a child in the dark, alone with vital tissue. So, we kill the urge, abort the natural (?) process, with Geist light (ne fais pas l'enfant).

A Streetcar Named Desire is simply about a Polish laborer and a psychologically and physically frail ex-English teacher and their territorial struggle over the lustful and vulnerable sister of the latter and wife of the former. Blanche Dubois arrives at the ragged flat of Stanley and Stella, located in the French Quarter of New Orleans, in anguish over her lost world of aristocratic, southernly, romantic ideals. Her ideal world is

symbolized by Belle Reve, a luxurious plantation, once her home. Belle Reve has decayed, symbolizing the decay of her ideals. She wishes to continue the pursuit of her ideal world, and hopes to convince Stella that these romantic notions are purer and more respectable than those of Stanley. But Stella needs Stanley to protect her.

Stanley is an animal, a very physical breed, a clown, but he is a hard worker and he seems to be headed for progress in the whirlwind of New World progression. Blanche, symbolic of the Old World aristocracy, would be happy to remain stagnant. She challenges Stanley, with Stella clinging to his hair-shirt-tails, and disintegrates under the pressure of the "real" versus her "fantasy:" New versus Old. Blanche is raped by Stanley, and she is then further driven into her romantic fantasy. She is carted off to an asylum to protect the marriage of Stanley and Stella, as Stella knows of the rape. Blanche has impacted everyone's lives, but she has been ultimately and finally destroyed.

It has been called an extremely objective play, which with the amazing force of its objectivity, forces one's (Blanche's?) sympathies and facors with Blanche. As Joseph Wood Krutch notes, the pity lies

> not in the fact that the horoine resists, but in the fact that she has so little to resist with. 'Gentility' is the only form if idealism or spirituality accessible to her;

> perhaps Mr. Williams seems to be saying, the only form now accessible to anyone, or our culture is ugly just because we have no living equivalent for what by now is a mere anachronism...he is not so much ridiculing her Southern ladies and Southern gentleman as he is reproaching the rest of the world for having found no equivalent of what their ladyhood and gentlemanliness once represented.[4]

Stanley is ugly, Blanche is gentle, Stella lies in between somewhere. "Moreover, strictly speaking, nothing that's said is true."[5]

Williams then wishes to make present the frail, irretrievable traces of our romantic and poetic Southern dinosaurs. Stanley is a ripe erasure of a fragile woman. He is the symbol of the cold, animalistic New World; Blanche is a symbol of the warm and humanistic world.

Blanche is thus portrayed as a fragile belle, a moth that flitters dangerously close to flame. Her hardened exterior is a false barrier to protect her vulnerable, soft heart. Vivian Leigh and Jessica Tandy have been our models. Stanley is animalistic, he is interested only in the physical. Sweaty, hairy, harsh, progressive. Brando was Stanley. Stella is "homy," movie magazines and candy. She is a "wife," a willing outlet for one like Stanley. Kim Hunter was perfect.

The PRODUCTION of Elia Kazan is generally the interpreter's "starting point" for getting a grip on this straightforward, objective play which critics often respond to as a structure too simple to contain the huge symbolism of the script: The play-script is more than it is. Nonetheless, Kazan's PRODUCTION remains THE production.

Kazan, however, was concerned with the response to Stanley--the audience laughed when he was crude towards Blanche; they enjoyed his way of carrying and expressing himself. Brando was Stanley. Williams reminded Kazan that Stanley was not evil. Kazan apparently dropped his concern and stated, "there was no way to spoil Streetcar. No matter who directed (interpreted) it, with what concept, what cast, in what language."[6]

The theme of the play? Williams said there wasn't one.[7] He just wanted to present the lives of his characters objectively. But he liked Stanley. He loved Stanley. Even Louis B. Mayer wanted to make sure the "awful woman" did not destroy Stanley and Stella.[8] But didn't Williams want his audience to weep for Blanche? Blanche was Williams. Didn't he try to organize/structure his events and subjectively fashion his characters so that there would be specific vision. Wasn't there a desirable structure? Well, there was no way to spoil Streetcar. No matter who directed it, with what concept, what cast, in what language. So, according to the PRODUCTION, we

sympathize with Blanche, but we love Stanley. Blanche (Williams) loved Stanley (Williams' lover, Pancho), but knew Stanley had to thrive in his own necessary way. The love was mutual, but necessarily destructive. There was no way to ruin Streetcar.

The pesky Blanche with the whorish, unrespectable background comes to the ragged cave of the hard working Stanley, uninvited, attempting to destroy his acceptable Old World. She taunts the primitive man with her decadent New World poetics. At the same time, she has traces of primitive roots and is thus drawn to his violent and sexual behaviors, as Williams was to Pancho.[9]

Art is made out of symbols the way your body is made out of vital tissue. Desire is traditionally the vital tissue found in Streetcar. Desire is a streetcar Blanche rides until she transfers to another streetcar, Cemeteries, which deposits her at Stanley and Stella's. This simple transference foreshadows, symbolizes, her down fall (A Streetcar Named Cemeteries?). The opposite of Desire, then, is Death. Desire/Death is simply a binary opposition which Williams employed in an attempt to satisfy his need for structure: Desire opens up a space and Death, in a metaphorical (vital tissue) sense, of course, closes it. A closed text is a dead text, but there are no closed texts--no TEXTS, no PRODUCTIONS.

Williams said he had no theme, so did he in fact say

anything besides, "I have no theme?" Did he find a way to say nothing, or something about nothing, and so in fact produce a dead text. Streetcar a symbol of nothingness; dead vital tissue? Okay. But what else could be said? What else could be thought? Everything that can be said can be said clearly, but not everything that can be thought can be said (who would want to do either?).[10] Moreover, nothing that is thought can be said "clearly." We can never be sure what is there--what has been "erased" and what has been "saved." The desire for structure in Streetcar opens spaces and the rewriting process always already begins.

Williams loved Pancho/Blanche loved Stanley. That the play is objective is a subjective gesture. Borrowing from Foucault, there exists the lawless and uncharted dimension of the heteroclite--signifiers/signified are "placed" in sites so different from one another that it is impossible to find a common place beneath them all: The tradition of A Streetcar Named Desire is different from itself. Utopias "exist" so that we can ignore the chaos of the heteroclite, so that we can "get on with the story." Utopias are necessary myths; because of the heteroclite, utopias are themselves Chaotic.

The "reality" is a Heterotopia. Heterotopias "dessicate speech, stop words in their tracts, contest the very possibility of language at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize

the lyricism of our sentences."[11] The very impossibility of saying what you mean, meaning what you say: Blanche signifies a newer world than does Stanley. She resists yet courts destruction. Stanley tries to fend off the attack. It is a survival of the fittest. It is legal to defend your life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to the death in one's own dwelling. Thus, the writerly license of luring Heterotopias into Utopias,or, more properly anarchistic, utopias without worshippers. "The Myth of Streetcar, cont."

Silence: providing time for the continuing or exploring of thought.[12] No. Silence is death, utopia. Heterotopia: the endless chain of thought. The last word on Streetcar would be utopia. But the "last word" is but a signifier in an endless chain of signification. Even the precedent for this is different from itself (indifferent to itself?). "The Myth of Streetcar, cont."

Stanley is an ape. He precedes Blanche. Blanche is a strain of Stanley which resisted change. A recessive gene. Stanley protects his cave and his primate wife, Stella, who he drags about by the hair and aggressively mates by the moon light. The ape-mates are from the Old World, the Pre-historic world. The garden of Eden.

Stanley is most at home with primitive language, a Pre-

language. Williams could only vaguely suggest Stanley's language. Stanley is before language--he doesn't think in words. He thinks in terms of pictures of primal needs. He is on the guard against New Worlds, stale worlds which offer a crushing blow to all that is primal. Blanche's world. An uncaring poetry of pseudo-spirituality. Stanley's world. Untainted collision between the spiritual and the physical: His daily practices are rituals which are repeated continuously. The physical repetition gains a spiritual significance.

Blanche is deceiving flame, a frightening threat to Stanley's world which is lit only by sun, moon, and an intense passion to survive, to progress. She attempts to chain Stanley and light profiles of distortion. Blanche wants Stanley to see only shadows. Shadows of shadows. She wants to cast herself as the self she wishes to be against the wall for Stanley to accept as "reality."

Stanley is challenged, but does not ever believe the lie. He wishes to return to his own indeterminancy. Blanche doesn't accept her indeterminancy. Stella is the fulcrum. Stanley is challenged.

World culture has a memory, so Blanche returns, attracted to what she once was--an ape like Stanley. She is thus drawn to her primal roots, ultimately she wishes to seduce and destroy, or

seduce and be destroyed by, the primitivistic. Her History has been one of strong discordance between the physical and the spiritual. She has met her match in Stanley. She introduces fire to him, and he burns her in it.

Blanche (is) derivative. She has never come to pass for she has never been but an impossibility. Stella recognizes herself in both Blanche and Stanley. She is split between herself. She is in metamo-phosis--part ape, part stagnant plantation belle. She is thrown into a constant state of being different from herselves. She is distant future vs. Pre-history. She is the battlefield for the war between Blanche and Stanley.

Blanche is obsessed with the dream of being the original, but she understands that she is a copy, a false commentary on Stanley. Ideally, banish Stanley, but Blanche knows he is impassable, and he begets another primate to boot. In short, Blanche attempts to write her way into an original space, but instead opens her writing up to Writing: As she attempts to re-write Stanley,his traces reach up and hold her down for him to re-write her. Nothing, however, is erased. Stanley is himself re-written. Non-presence.

Stanley's book depicts him as present before Blanche, not vice versa. He is trace for Blanche. Blanche has never been Present before Stanley. She is driven to destroy his trace.

think of everything we have been able to "destroy" in the shape of letters in our short lives.[13]

14

Since no one will join Blanche in turning against the primitive, the Original Non-original, she retreats into her own non-existence. Stanley, who has been teased by Blanche's undisguisable attraction to the primitive, from which she "originated" yet desires to destroy (just like Williams himself), intends to destroy her before Stella believes the untruths of the Shadows Blanche has cast. Stella is torn--she is compelled to accept both worlds. Stanley does not want to be seduced by the Apparitions in Plato's cave. He does not want to fall into the spaces of Blanche. However, although he operates on a different plane than Blanche (Progressive versus Stagnant), he is tainted. He is always already different from himself; now, he's different from himself as different self. Blanche was infectious, and Stanley's primitive action was measured by future rules as applied by Stella as they were learned from the "New World."

Stella is hurt by Stanley's method. She is not hurt by the result--the absent non-absence of Blanche. Stanley is hurt by the tainting of one world by another. He is a beast of nature, a sort of primitivistic vampire who attempts to bring Blanche back

to the Old World. The result is disaster. The two worlds are inexorably written together. There is no separation, no purity, no finality.

It is worth noting that the characters of Streetcar, particularly Stanley, Blanche, and Stella, are notably "different" from tradition, as is the setting. Tradition has been brutal to the imagination where this play has been concerned. A production of Streetcar much varied from Kazan's production is treated by traditionalists much like a disrupted childhood memory--the illusion is much more charming and safe than the truth.

Stanley is not ape-like,he is its fore-runner, living accordingly in his cave. His pre-language is interrupted only by Blanche, who is very much a chameleon of form and content: Occasionally she is a tawdry Belle, at other times a flame, then a shadow, but always is she part of the Old World of Stanley. Stella, not the earthy and lusty wife of tradition, is half Old World and half New World: A Cromagnon Belle? Their possibilities must be explored in rehearsal, as the technical requirements could become unmanageable (thus, deconstruction must not continue to be employed and/or looked upon simply as a style or anti-method; it should be considered as an activity one engages in to seek out other "catharses" of "truths").

No, this should not be so. Streetcar is Streetcar, and this is not Streetcar. Streetcar--the Production, Williams, Blanche, etc., are DEAD. Streetcar is done. It is done as it is. It is totally Present in its Death. Present because it is Dead. Dead because it is Present. "Only the dead don't talk. That's what you think! They are the most talkative, especially if they remain alone. It's rather a question of getting them to shut up."[15]

Streetcar will not, cannot, silence itself by itself. It gives up to its song, which we try to protect as "being" self-evident--a song sounding the same as itself to us as a collective one. We try to say, "Shut up."

> You understand that whoever writes must indeed ask himself what it is asked of him to write, and then he writes under the dictation of same addressee, this is trivial. But "some address," I always leave the gender of number indeterminate, must indeed be the object of a choice of object, and chosen and seduced. "Some addressee" winds up then, to the extent that the approach, the approximation, the appropriation, the "introjection," all progress, no longer able to ask anything that has not already been whispered [souffle'] by me. Thereby everything is corrupted, there is only the mirror, no more image, they no longer see each other, no longer destine each other, nothing more.

Do you think this

exhaustion is happening

to us?"

ENDNOTES

1. Novalis in Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," Styles of Radical Will. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969, p. 26.

2. Foucault, This Is Not a Pipe. University of California Press, 1982, p. 12

3. In Carson McCullers, Reflections in a Golden Eye, New York: New Directions, pxiii, 1941.

4. Joseph Wood Krutch in The Nation (CLXVII). October 23, 1988, pp. 473-474.

5. Sontag, p. 13

6. Elia Kazan, A Life. New York: Alfred A. Knopf p. 346.

7. Williams in Kazan, p. 347.

8. In Kazan, p. 345

9. Kazan, pp. 346-347.

10. Sontag, p. 18.

11. Michael Foucault, The Order of Things. New York: Pantheon, 1970, p. 48.

12. Sontag, p. 18.

13. Jacques Derrida, The Post Card. Alan Bass, trans. The University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 32.

14. "It is bad to predestine one's reading...", Ibid, p. 4.

15. Ibid, p. 246.

16. Ibid, pp. 143-144

16. Ibid, pp. 143-144.